



Donna Partow

best-selling author of *Becoming a Vessel God Can Use*

LET YOUR
Make a Difference
Right Where
You Are

LIFE
Count

LET YOUR
Only God Knows
What He Can Do
Through You

LIFE
Count

Donna Partow



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P R E S S

LET YOUR LIFE COUNT

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A NOTE FROM DONNA

For more than a decade I've listened (in person, online, and over the airwaves) to the heartbeats of today's Christian women from around the world. What I'm hearing is this: we want our lives to count. We want to know that we can make a difference—in small ways and large—in our homes, in our communities, and on the planet. In my travels I've met women living in inner cities, in the suburbs, and in remote jungle villages who have yielded their daily routines to God...with powerful and meaningful results.

You will meet some of these women in the pages of this book, but it is my prayer that we can come together in a more personal way via online community. As you read this book, I hope you'll join us to share *your story* and *your insights*. I envision an ever-expanding network of individuals, small groups, churches, and organizations banding together to “spur one another on toward love and good deeds” (Hebrews 10:24). If you'd like to be part of this community, please visit us at www.donnapartow.com.

To help you work through this material in a small group setting, I've created a Let Your Life Count Leader's Forum (www.donnapartow.com/lylc_leaders) complete with a teacher's manual, downloadable handouts, ready-to-use PowerPoint presentations, free audios, links to resources, and much more. If your church would like to sponsor a Let Your Life Count conference, please e-mail lylc@donnapartow.com.

There's no greater joy, no more-certain source of confidence, than

knowing the God of the universe is carrying out His grand plan through you. In this book you'll find practical steps you can take to make yourself more available to Him and increasingly aware of His work around you. But one of the most important steps you can take is to make the decision not to journey alone. Won't you join us?

I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.

EXODUS 9:16

Your Life Can Count

Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?”

The King will reply, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.”

MATTHEW 25:37–40

Few people will ever forget the day Hurricane Katrina ripped through the Gulf Coast, doing billions of dollars’ worth of damage and driving tens of thousands of people from their homes.¹ It was a disaster of mind-boggling proportions that mobilized some people and immobilized others. Many looked at the magnitude of the task and decided there was no point in getting involved. *What can one person do?* they said to themselves. Others rolled up their sleeves and did what they could.

This was the case with one pastor I heard interviewed on Christian

radio.² He said that as his congregation gathered on Sunday morning, they noticed a traffic jam forming on the nearby freeway as people fled the coastal areas. As the realization dawned, they decided to serve rather than continue with the service. They went to the freeway and beckoned travelers to the church where the travelers received food, shelter, and comfort. At midnight, as the building overflowed with nearly two thousand harried hurricane victims, the pastor called a nearby church and explained that people were still flooding in. That church, too, soon became a sanctuary from one of the worst natural disasters in American history.

But we don't have to be on the outskirts of a hurricane or some other disaster to let our lives count. We can reach out to the people who cross our paths each day; all we have to do is let God work through us. People are fleeing personal disasters every hour of every day, on every freeway and byway in America, not to mention every dirt road in every nation on earth. No doubt at least one of these—Hurricane Divorce, Hurricane Cancer, and Hurricane Unemployment, just to name three—struck in your neighborhood today. Hurricane AIDS is decimating the continent of Africa while Hurricane Terrorism wreaks havoc throughout the Middle East and even Europe.

Please don't think this is a book about Christian activism, although in some ways it is. It's really about living the way we were intended: loving God and caring about people (see Matthew 22:36–40). I used to believe only big gestures counted in the grand scheme of things. I was wrong. The hope and healing we offer as we wipe away the tears of a friend or lighten the load of a stranger have just as much value.

We're coming to the end of another hot summer here in Phoenix, where it's been up to 117 degrees. Last week, as my daughter and I were driving home from the pharmacy, I noticed that a public bus had broken down. The driver and two stranded passengers were sitting nearby, frying in the three-digit temperature. I know they say it's a dry heat, but trust me, it's absolutely unbearable when it's that hot, dry or not! As I drove past that broken-down bus, my heart broke for those people.

My mind flashed back to the time in my life when I stood on sweltering, overcrowded buses, commuting in and out of the West Philadelphia neighborhood where I lived, getting by on thirteen dollars a week for groceries. So I turned my air-conditioned car around and offered to be their bus for the day. They were overjoyed by the small act of kindness. I let them know we helped them because God had prompted us to, and I mentioned the church we attend. I pray it counted for the kingdom; I know it lifted my spirits to spend a few minutes thinking about someone other than me, myself, and I.

This is not the book I was hired to write, but I'm writing it anyway and I want to tell you why. Within the last month, my teenage nephew died—suddenly and tragically—and my father suffered congestive heart failure. He is now dying, slowly and inevitably. I've been reflecting not only on their lives but also on my own. More than anything, I want to know that when I'm gone it will have mattered that I walked the planet. I want to know that my life counted for something, not just to readers or audience members (though I'm profoundly thankful for all of you!), but to people around me—you know, people who might actually show up at my funeral. Will those

people who watched my life up close and personal say I pointed them to God just by the way I conducted myself each day?

I had been struggling with the infamous writer's block (which I always thought was pure fiction, but I now know is only too real) for more than a year when these two events unfolded. One day, the thought came to me: *If I could write only one more book, what would it be? What would I say if I knew my days were numbered (which, of course, they are—see Psalm 139:16)?* The words leaped out of my mouth: “Let your life count.” I would stand on the highest mountain and shout, “Let your life count!”

After more than two decades of following Jesus, I've discovered that:

- Who we are speaks louder than what we say.
- Who we are accomplishes more than anything we could ever do.

That's why one of my recent books was entitled *Becoming the Woman I Want to Be*. Being must precede doing. God created us as human *beings*, not human *doings*. However, God's first order of business was to give people work to do. He put Adam in the garden and told him to get busy naming animals and tending the earth. God desires for us to lead fruitful lives in which who we are is manifested in what we do, in which what we believe transforms the way we live.

My message is this: when who we are and how we live reflect God's heart, our lives will truly count for eternity.

Nothing else matters! A life lived for yourself is empty, no matter how rich you are. And a life lived for God and others is rich, no matter how empty your wallet. It's not about us, and it's not about

stuff—it's about Him, His kingdom, and introducing people to His kingdom.

I firmly believe that our lives can and will count, in small ways and large, in ways we might expect and in ways beyond our imaginations, if we'll simply open our eyes to the world around us and open our hearts to the possibility that we might be the answer to someone's prayer. Since you've picked up a book entitled *Let Your Life Count*, I know you believe that as well. My goal is to inspire and motivate you to move forward in faith, to take a few steps—some baby steps, some big steps—in obedience to God's call. You don't have to be anyone other than who you are, and, unless God tells you otherwise, it's probably best to start right where you are. If I could convince you of one thing, it would be this: God is working everywhere, even in your neighborhood, and especially in your heart.

Please don't take this journey alone! Share the experience with women around the world in our online Let Your Life Count Community. Let us encourage and challenge you, even as you share your insights and experiences with others. Visit www.donnapartow.com/lylc_community for details. If you'd like to share this material with a group in your community, visit www.donnapartow.com/lylc_leaders for a free Leader's Manual, downloadable handouts, ready-to-use Power Point presentations, free audios, links to resources, and much more.

Maybe you're thinking, *That sounds great in theory, but exactly how is this book going to help me?* Will this book show me, step by step, the pathway to letting my life count? Well, that's my goal! When you turn to the next chapter, you'll find out why it's okay to "Just Be Yourself" and be reassured that letting your life count doesn't have to be an emotionally exhausting ordeal. It won't be when you "Don't Try to Make Your Life Count." Instead, you'll be blessed to "Discover God-Directed Prayer" and find practical suggestions to help you "Live Daily in God's Presence." As you begin to *listen* in prayer and walk with an awareness of God throughout the day, you'll discover that "You Were Created to Be a Sign That God Cares" and, in fact, "God Has Prepared Good Works for You to Do."

Too often when we think about serving God, we immediately think of serving at church, and we worry that we're not as spiritual, qualified, or well-informed as everyone else sitting in the pews around us. However, "You Don't Have to Be a Church Insider to Count." A wide variety of opportunities exists to let your life count, and few of them require a theological degree. Even so, maybe you feel inadequate. You're not alone, so "Don't Wait Until You Feel Good Enough" to get involved or you'll end up waiting a long time! I hope to convince you that you're as good as everybody else but that, at the same time, it's important for all of us to "Walk in Humility."

An important component of letting your life count is keeping your motives in check. That's why I share from my own life journey some of the wrong motives that have hindered my effectiveness. The only legitimate and lasting motive for service is to "Let Christ's Love

Compel You” rather than to be compelled by duty or a selfish desire to get something in return. Only Christ’s compelling love can provide the strength it takes to “Press Through Hindrances” and can empower you to “Dare to Do the Thing You Dread.” We all have fears and personal insecurities; we all face challenges and difficulties. But that doesn’t mean our lives can’t count. Instead, you’ll find it’s possible to “Do It Afraid,” knowing that anything can count, yes, “Even Your Problems Can Count,” although you must “Be Willing to Sacrifice.”

I hope to encourage you to believe that you truly can “Let Every Season Count” and that your opportunities are not restricted by age or anything else, as long as you “Maintain a Teachable Heart.” In fact, “Even When You Fall, God Can Still Use You” as long as you “Develop a Marathon Mentality,” knowing that sometimes you’ll run, sometimes you’ll crawl, but God Himself is the One who has promised to get you across that finish line.

Each chapter concludes with three components: Remember, Reflect, and Reach. “Remember” recaps the central point of each chapter. These, along with a key related scripture verse, are included in the back of the book for easy reference. “Reflect” features questions for deeper reflection that can be used personally and to facilitate group discussions. “Reach” suggests a practical next step you can take that will enable you to let your life count, right now, right where you are. These are steps you can take on your own or in conjunction with others.

To get the most out of this book, you should prayerfully consider working through it with others who share your desire to let your life count. Don’t be a reader; be an implementer! Perhaps set a goal to step

out of your comfort zone at least once a week and apply what you are learning. The best way to ensure faithful follow-through is to establish accountability, even if just one person will routinely ask you, “How did you let your life count this week?”

My prayer for you is that this book will represent a new chapter in your life, a new season of both accepting where you are *and* believing God wants to take you to new places—in your relationship with Him, in your community, and maybe even around the world. Your life can count!

Remember

Your life can and will count, in small ways and large, in ways you might expect and in ways beyond your imagination, if you'll simply open your eyes to the world around you and open your heart to the possibility that you might be someone's answer to prayer.

Reflect

Do you sense that your life counts? Do you sincerely believe your life can count, right where you are? Why or why not? What do you think is standing between you and the life you truly want to live? What do you hope to gain by working through this book?

Reach

Contact several people who might want to take this journey alongside you. If you are part of a small group or Sunday-school class, propose this for the next study. At a minimum, identify one person who will encourage you to let your life count and hold you accountable to finish what you've started.

Dear heavenly Father, I thank You for reassuring me today that my life can and will count. In the coming days and weeks, I invite You to speak to my heart to encourage me as I realize the ways my life already counts and to challenge me to stretch in new areas. I believe my life can count, in small ways and large, as I open my heart and make myself available to You. Lord, I want to be the answer to someone's prayer today. Maybe even inviting others to join me in this journey will be an answer, not only to my prayer, but to their prayers as well. Lead me to the person (or people) who can both encourage and challenge me. Amen.

Just Be Yourself

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us.

ROMANS 12:3–6

I'll never forget the day I spoke at a conference alongside Patsy Clairmont. Here's how the schedule went: she spoke, I spoke, she spoke, everyone forgot I spoke. At that point in my not exactly illustrious career, I could easily count the number of messages I'd delivered. However, I had purchased one of Patsy's tapes from Focus on the Family because a speech coach had told me she was the best in the business. I listened to that tape over and over again until I could have *delivered* Patsy's message for her. I really, really wanted to be Patsy

Clairmont. Patsy, being a very sharp lady, figured that out simply by listening to me as I tried to be her—and she graciously encouraged me to develop my own style.

So I looked for someone else I could become just like. I even took a training class that instructed me on how to drape myself in scarves (scarves used to be *quite the thing*)! I purchased several and made a valiant attempt to appear refined, but I never did get the knack for it. Instead, the scarves kept falling off my shoulders, and I looked like a nut (which, of course, is only appropriate). After much prayer and contemplation, I decided that I really, really, really wanted to be one of Billy Graham's daughters. If I live to be one hundred years old, I'll never forget the day I heard a Voice from heaven say, *You're not Billy Graham's daughter; get over it.* Okay, so the Voice wasn't audible, but I knew it was God nonetheless.

Although I understood that being grafted into the First Family of Christendom was out of the question, I wasn't ready to give up the quest to become someone other than me. In recent years, I've driven my family and friends crazy trying to follow in the footsteps of yet *another* famous Christian Bible teacher who shall remain nameless. Amazingly enough, God hasn't blessed any of my attempts to become someone I'm not. Do you think maybe that's because He wants me to just be myself? Nah! That can't be it!

In Acts 8, we encounter someone else who was trying to become someone he was never intended to be. His name was Simon the Sorcerer. Simon amazed the people of Jerusalem by performing magic tricks. Then he became a Christian and was baptized. The Bible doesn't question the authenticity of Simon's conversion, but it does tell us he

quickly shipwrecked his newfound faith. How? By trying to be someone he wasn't. Notice how harmlessly it all begins: "And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw" (verse 13). Unfortunately, Simon wasn't following Philip to learn and grow as a disciple; he wanted to become Philip; he wanted to become an apostle.

Isn't that how it starts for us, as well? We see someone—at work, at church, on television. Or we read about a woman in a magazine or a book. And we are so amazed by the great things she can do! *Wow, that woman can bring home the bacon and fry it up in the pan! What a spiritual giant! What an awesome ministry!* Admiration is wonderful. Asking that person to mentor us might prove even more wonderful. But when we react by coveting her talents, opportunities, or lifestyle, our very own shipwreck is on the horizon. That was certainly the case with Simon.

He didn't think his life counted anymore because he no longer had large crowds following him. It's unfortunate that even as Christians we often measure our lives by how much applause we get and our accomplishments by how much attention they draw. In truth, God is far more interested in who we are when no one's watching and

If you need help discovering who you are, take the Skills and Interests Inventory. Visit www.donnapartow.com/lylc_inventory.

in what we do when we will get nothing in return. Eventually, Simon's attempts to be someone "important" landed him in big trouble. Some time later, when Peter and John came to Jerusalem and began dispensing the gift of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands, Simon offered them money if they would give him the same ability. Peter rebuked him, saying, "You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God" (verse 21). In particular, Peter pointed out that Simon was "full of bitterness" (verse 23).

When we compare our lives—especially our positions, gifts, and opportunities—to someone who has more than we have, we set ourselves up to become full of bitterness too. Simon wasn't content with the knowledge that he had been saved by grace and baptized into the family of God. It wasn't enough that he enjoyed the privilege of listening to Philip's teaching; it wasn't enough that he could witness the power of God at work through the apostles. No, he couldn't enjoy where God had placed him because he wanted to be someone he was not.

How about you? I sincerely hope you do not waste your valuable time and energy trying to be someone you're not. Are you a stay-at-home mom trying to keep up with the lifestyles enjoyed by two-income families? Or are you a working mother trying to compete with the homemaking accomplishments of a stay-at-home mom? Are you a servant trying to be a teacher or a prophet trying to exercise gifts of mercy? The Bible says we have different gifts and different calls (Romans 12:3–8 and 1 Corinthians 12:4–30). God wants His church to accomplish a wide variety of missions, and accomplishing these tasks

will require a wide variety of people. When we try to be someone we're not, we are not only robbing ourselves of contentment, but we're also robbing the world of everything God wants to do through *us*.

My friend Deanna worked for several years as a housecleaner. As a result, she was by herself and rarely saw another person all day long. But she would sometimes pray, *Lord, let me make a difference in at least one person's life today*. Inevitably, after praying, she would either run into someone she knew or a complete stranger who needed something. She responded to those opportunities by helping however she could.

Here is one small example. One of the homeowners unexpectedly showed up in the middle of the day and was having a problem with his cell phone. Deanna recalls, "He was very stressed because he was busy running his own business and needed his phone 24/7! He thought he would have to take time to go to the cell phone store. I picked up the phone, hit a few buttons, and voilà! All I had to do was turn the ringer back on. He was so grateful! I don't think I ever saw that man again, and I cleaned his house for almost a year. But I felt like God used me to de-stress his life a bit."

Deanna adds, "The truth is, cleaning people's houses—doing a great job, showing up when I said I would, and praying for them while I clean—can make a difference in these people's lives all by itself. All of us affect someone else every day. These seem like little things that don't matter, but they matter to the other person, and they matter to God because if we've done it for someone else, we've done it for Him. He takes those things and multiplies them just like He did the loaves and fishes."

Yes, a praying housecleaner counts!

Whoever you are, whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God, and He will make it count. My fellow author Sandy Wood shared the following story¹ that beautifully illustrates how something seemingly mundane can count for the kingdom:

Joan doesn't think of herself as a missionary. She thinks of herself as the mother of eight children. Although she's no authority on evangelistic strategies, she is an expert on what children need most: a kind look, a soft touch, and a warm embrace. On her first visit to Malawi, Joan noted the ragged, tattered clothes worn by the orphans. She decided to bring buttons and thread to mend their clothes and touch their hearts. She convinced two of her friends to accompany her on the next trip: Kaye and Carole.

For countless hours each day, Joan, Kaye, and Carole sat among the village children and sewed buttons onto their shirts, dresses, skirts, and pants. The women were barely visible in the middle of a sea of patient but expectant children who held out their ragged clothes asking, "May I have a button, please?" Carole's natural shyness provided the compassion required to coax some of the more reluctant children forward. Unfamiliar smells, dirt, coughs, and group pressure from hundreds of young bodies did not distract the three seamstresses from their task. Children walked miles from surrounding villages to seek not just new buttons but the kindness in each seamstress's voice, the softness of her touch. So prized was the

addition of one pretty button that a young girl tore a plain button off her dress and approached Joan to ask, “Button, please?” These three mothers traveled thousands of miles, not to conduct an evangelistic crusade, not even to teach a Vacation Bible School, but simply to sew buttons, compelled by the love of God.

The children of that Malawi village would have been robbed of these blessings if these women had not been willing to be themselves, to just be three moms who had sewn their share of buttons. For this assignment, all God needed was loving mothers.²

When I asked women what they would most want to hear in a book entitled *Let Your Life Count*, the number one answer was, “Tell me I can count right where I am, just as I am, that I don’t have to be a missionary or world-changer, unless that’s what God calls me to be. Tell me that living an ordinary life can count when I live it for an extraordinary God. Tell me that God is in the mundane just as powerfully as He is in the miraculous.”

I’m writing to tell you just that.

Believe it or not, a pastor, evangelist, or Bible scholar is not always the right person for the job. Sometimes the right person is plain old ordinary you! (Not that I think you are ordinary, but you know what I mean! Too many of us underestimate our worth in God’s kingdom.) God created you to be you and placed you on this earth with your skills, interests, and life experiences at this precise moment in time for a reason; don’t thwart His plan. Be yourself.

What are some of your hobbies and skills? Not just your “super-spiritual” gifts, but your ordinary interests and experiences. What is your daily routine like? Turn everything over to God, and let Him show you how He wants to use *you*. If you want to let your life count, just be yourself. God created only one you, and only you can fulfill that role. Discover the freedom of yielding to God, and don’t try to make your life count.

Remember

God created you to be you and placed you—with your skills, interests, and life experiences—at this precise moment in time for a reason; don’t thwart His plan. Be yourself.

Reflect

What are some of your skills, interests, and life experiences that God might desire to work through? How have you seen God work through your life in the past?

Reach

Talk to some close friends and ask each of them to identify five unique things that make you “just you.”

Compile a list and give special consideration to those things that were mentioned by more than one person. Begin to pray, opening your heart to the ways God might want to work through “just you.”

Dear heavenly Father, thank You for creating me exactly as I am and placing me on this earth with my skills, interests, and life experiences at this precise moment in time. I know I'm here for a reason. Lord, lead me to people who can help me identify those characteristics that make me truly unique. Sometimes it's so hard to see the good in me. Forgive me for those times when I've tried to be someone I'm not, and empower me by Your Holy Spirit to become all You've created me to be so that I can truly let my life count. Amen.



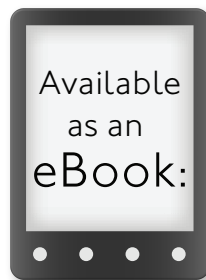
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